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FILM WORKSHOP SUCCESSFUL WITH TSU STUDENTS.

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AN UPWARD BOUND FILM WORKSHOP AT TEXAS SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY EXPOSED STUDENTS TO FILMS AS A CREATIVE ART FORM, A MEANS OF COMMUNICATION, AND A BASIS FOR DISCUSSING VALUES. IN ADDITION TO VIEWING SEVERAL SHORT, PROFESSIONALLY-DEVELOPED FILMS, STUDENTS WROTE AND PRODUCED TWO OF THEIR OWN. ONE STUDENT-PRODUCED FILM--A LIGHT SHOW--ILLUMINATED THE UNITY OF THE ARTS THROUGH THE USE OF SPECIAL EFFECTS TO COMBINE FILM, MUSIC, PAINTING, AND DANCE. THE OTHER, A FILM ABOUT A MAN CONVICTED OF A CRIME HE DID NOT COMMIT, USED FLASHBACK EXTENSIVELY. WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES INCLUDED (1) LEARNING HOW TO SHOOT AND EDIT FILM, (2) WRITING EFFECTIVE MOVIE SCRIPTS, AND (3) VISITING MUSEUMS TO STUDY DISPLAYS OF PAINTINGS AND PHOTOGRAPHY. STUDENTS USED CAMERAS, PROJECTORS, TAPE-RECORDERS, SPLICERS, DISPLAYS OF MAGAZINE PHOTOGRAPHS, RECORD ALBUMS AND TAPES OFFERING A WIDE SELECTION OF MUSICAL IDEAS AND MOODS, AND REFERENCE BOOKS ON FILM HISTORY, PROJECTION PROCESSES, SOUND, COLOR, SPECIAL EFFECTS, CINEMATOGRAPHY, AND CURRENT TRENDS IN FILM PRODUCTION. (THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN "IDEA EXCHANGE," VOL. 3 (NOVEMBER 1967), 3-5, 28.) (JB)

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FILM WORKSHOP SUCCESSFUL WITH TSU STUDENTS

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Texas Southern UPWARD BOUND approached teaching with film two ways. One involved discussion of feature films one night each week of the summer session. These were well attended by the whole student body.

The second and, to me, more exciting approach was to develop a film workshop to expose students to film as a creative art form, as a means of communication, and as a basis for discussion of values. Here thirty-eight students became involved in the actual production of a film from beginning to end. After such a project students cannot see a film again without basic analytical understanding of the process.

This is a deeply personal experience for a student: he sees his face projected on the screen; he reacts; and in his own terms he's caught and he wants to come back. If he's out of focus, he learns to focus next time or learns how to move his camera slowly if he was too fast before. Suddenly he's learned twice as much as he ever thought he could.

Last summer the students gradually took over the workshop. What was produced was their work. They came to realize that time and patience were important elements in producing what they wanted to say.

Their own involvement and experience was the teacher.

June 12 - 16:

The workshop began with a brief introduction to film as an art and as a means of communicating ideas. The introduction was brief; I showed the students how to load the camera (16 mm Bell & Howell). A student played a record with which the twenty-seven members of the workshop were familiar; the students started dancing; and each student shot five or ten feet of another student dancing. When the film came back, we played the record while the film was running. This created a lot of excitement and exposed the students to the use of the camera, to film, and to the use of sound.

The rest of the week we spent developing ideas for producing a film of our own. The students had to decide on an idea and write a script. Their first idea, of making a monster film, had the support of a majority of the class. The script was written, but I felt they should have selected another subject, one that dealt with a human situation. From listening to a song about solitude and freedom, the students came up with another idea: a man convicted of a crime he didn't commit, and sentenced to life in prison, is freed after fourteen years in a cell. The film begins with the freed man walking down the highway with a jacket over his shoulder and from the highway shot there is a flash back to his earlier life, to his girlfriend, the crime, the trial, and prison.

On Tuesday the workshop met in the evening to see three short films: MECHANISM (by a Boston University student showing the mechanical parts of a clock and how they work - an abstract approach), and two films on color and music relationships by McClaren of the Canadian Film Board, NFC. The films were discussed after each was shown.

June 19 - 23: ▷4

The second week we began shooting scenes of a couple together in a park. A leading actor and actress were chosen and locations were found. The script was worked on further to achieve a sequence in scenes and some parts were cut. We intended to complete two films during the eight week program, and the students decided to do the monster film when we finished this one. I was concerned that the students would not have the time to complete two films unless they chose to make a shorter film.

The short films seen on Tuesday night were CORRAL, by the Canadian Film Board about a ranch hand breaking a horse on the plains in Alberta; JUDOKA (CNFB), about a Canadian who arrived in Japan with $40 in his pocket at the age of twenty-one and became a world champion in judo wrestling. Also seen was a reel of TV commercials which presented several ways of advertising the same product.

June 26 - 30:

Shooting continued. The students who had been doing the camera work had seen their footage and much of it was not good. At times the focus was bad, but the main problem was that the camera movements were too fast, making the action on the screen rapid and difficult to comprehend.

Toward the end of the week I suggested we try to do a light show. This was a completely new idea to the students. We talked about the idea and two students tried improvising a dance while we ran two projectors which created movement of light, colors and shadows. The dance gave the students an idea for another dance of shadows and we found ourselves involved with a light show.

The Tuesday night shorts were FACE OF LINCOLN, about a sculptor working in clay on the bust of Lincoln, and HAR-YOUTH, three statements about some boys and their girl friends, filmed by students at a neighborhood center in Harlem.

July 10 - 14:

The final scenes were shot in a county jail cell and in a TSU law school court room. Most of the responsibility for these scenes fell on the scriptwriter and she, at times, had to be director as well.

The shorts were A WORLD IS BORN, an animated film by Walt Disney on the creation of the earth, a surrealistic film I made during the winter, and two 8 mm films that Allen Page, the film workshop assistant, had made.

July 17 - 21:

Film editing began and because of bad exposure we had to reshoot the courtroom scene. We had moved the light show from the library to the main auditorium where we would hold the final performance. We bought a large sheet of paper 9' x 25' to produce the shadows we wanted and to act, at the same time, as a background for the colors, the shapes, and the dancers. Photographers from the Houston Post came to a rehearsal, liked it and photographed it. They also photographed students shooting one of the scenes for the film.

July 24 - 28:

A light show had recently opened in Houston on a professional basis. I called and told the manager what the students in the workshop were doing. With his cooperation, I was able to have most of my students get to see what a real light show was, and it helped our comprehension a great deal. The three girls who had made their outfits had the opportunity to dance in the show downtown and it turned out that they were better than the dancers who were dancing regularly in the show.

The film, titled THE LONG ROAD, was edited, but the night we were to show it was coming up and the sound track had not been made.

July 31 - August 4:

Because the sound track had not been started, four or five students stayed up most of the night to complete it. The film had one weak point where the flash backs into the man's life began, but THE LONG ROAD was a film well made. Our light show was not planned to be as elaborate as the commercial light show, but I felt that it had the refinement that many of the light shows lack, for each idea made a statement and had direction. Most light shows do not.

A note on the light show:

The light show is a new form of communication in the arts. It is the combined use of film, music, painting and dance in a way in which intentional effects are created, but most important are the unintentional effects of unity in the arts. The experience for the audience is direct and spontaneous and is over when the projectors, the music and the dancers stop. Our light show involved the whole workshop in both production and performance.

A note on the film workshop:

a fully developed film workshop would perhaps include these elements:

1. Equipment.
   1 16 m. 70-DR camera (Bell & Howell)
   1 tripod (Husky)
   1 16 m. Editor (Craig)
   1 16 m. projector (with sound) (Bell & Howell)
   2 splicers (Craig)
   floodlights
   2 tape recorders
2. Use of SOUND OF SIGHT record album: introduction to rhythm and music as commentative and creator of mood; effect of music and why and how created and used.
3. Use of 8 x 10 and/or 11 x 14 blowups of faces and photo-compositional-patterns (color and b/w): the face as a means of expression; the pattern as a means of expression; the total effect of pattern and face, why and how created. Use also THE FAMILY OF MAN.
4. Visits to museum displays of painting and photography: exposition to artistic composition and and color use for mood.
5. Frequent showing of shorts (National Film Board of Canada, Underground Film Co-Op in New York, Contemporary Films, Films Incorporated, etc.) with follow-up, if not preceding, discussions of meaning, theme and analysis of how conveyed. Also locate filmed documentary of shooting of GUNSMOKE episode and how three different editors edited the same footage, discussing the significant differences in the three versions and how they were achieved, the relocation of emphases, and the like.
6. Trips to commercial films followed, if not preceded, by discussion and analysis. Exposure to the various processes: cinerama, cinemascope, panavision as an extension of the classical geometric "Golden Section."
7. A convenient library of some fifty books for reference when a research question is posed: books on the history of films, projection processes, sound, color, special effects, the classic films, etc., cinematography, periodicals with reviews, current trends.
8. An ever-present display of magazine photographs in the workshop, collected and exhibited by the students as representing pictures of interest: compositionally, color-wise, total effect cast and subject, etc.
9. An extensive tape collection with a wide selection of musical ideas and moods: classical, jazz, the romantic, the starkly modern, old masters and new. Specialized pieces such as the ballet, holiday songs, feature film sound tracks and the Broadway musicals.

A bibliography on films used at Texas Southern University:

A DICTIONARY OF THE CINEMA. Barnes, $1.95.
THE SILENT CINEMA. Liam O'Lear. E. P. Dutton, $1.75.
INTERNATIONAL FILM GUIDE. Peter Cowie, editor. Barnes, $2.95.
MOVIES, THE HISTORY OF AN ART AND AN INSTITUTION. Richard Schickel. Basic Books, $4.95.
FILM: THE CREATIVE PROCESS. John Howard Lawson. Hill and Wang, $7.95.
CINEMA EYE, CINEMA EAR. John Russel Taylor. Hill and Wang, $5.
INTRODUCTION TO THE ART OF THE MOVIES. Noonday Press, $1.95.
FILM AS ART. Rudolph Arnheim. University of California Press, $1.50.
A GRAMMAR OF THE FILM. ▷28

TSU FILM continued

Raymond Spottiswoode. University of California Press, $1.50.
FILM: BK I: THE AUDIENCE AND THE FILMMAKER. Evergreen. E-140, $1.45.
FILM: BK II: FILMS OF PEACE AND WAR. Evergreen. E-378, $2.45.
AGEE ON FILM, REVIEWS AND COMMENTS. James Agee. Beacon Paperbacks. BP172, $2.45.
AGEE ON FILM, FIVE FILM SCRIPTS. James Agee. Beacon Paperbacks. BP173, $2.45.
PICTURE. Lillian Press. Dolphin Books. c390, $.95.
FILM WORLD. Iver Montagu. Pelican A686.
FILM AND SOCIETY. Richard Dyer MacCann. Scribner.
NOVELS INTO FILM. George Bluestone. University of California Press, $1.95.
THE CONTEMPORARY CINEMA. Penelope Houston. Pelican, $1.25.
I LOST IT AT THE MOVIES. Pauline Kael. Atlantic Monthly Press. Little, Brown and Company, $6. ◁